



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR
Amanda M. Dewey

COUNCIL MEMBERS
Jodie A. Kulpa-Eddy (Mayor Pro Tem)
Christopher S. Brittan Powell
Jason W. Papanikolas
Ethan D. Sweep

Town Meeting Minutes August 12, 2020 | 7:00 pm

Executive Session (6:30 p.m – 7:00 p.m.)

The Council held an executive session to discuss a nomination for the Governor's Service Award.

Regular Meeting (starting at 7:05 p.m.)

This meeting was held by videoconference due to the ongoing COVID-19 health emergency. The meeting was broadcast on Berwyn Heights cable TV channels and streamed on the Town website. Residents were given the opportunity to comment by telephone and email.

Present were Mayor Amanda Dewey, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, Councilmembers (CMs) Chris Brittan-Powell, Jason Papanikolas, and Ethan Sweep. Also present were Interim Town Manager (IITM) Laura Allen, Town Clerk Kerstin Harper, Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens, and Recreation Council President Susan Jones.

1. Announcements

Mayor Dewey announced that WSSC continues to work on repairing Pontiac Street after a watermain break and welcomed Interim Town Manager Allen to her first Town meeting.

2. Approval of the Agenda

On a motion by CM Sweep moved and second by CM Brittan Powell the agenda was approved 5 to 0.

3. Approval of Minutes

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved, and CM Brittan Powell seconded to approve the July 8 Town meeting minutes. The minutes were approved 4 – 0 – 1, with CM Papanikolas abstaining. The July 20 worksession minutes were approved 5-0 on a motion by MPT Kulpa Eddy and second by CM Brittan Powell.

4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Dewey thanked Town staff and others for quickly securing Pontiac Street after the watermain break. She also thanked the Police, Volunteer Fire Department and Town organizations for taking part in the National Night In parade, which drew many residents out into their yards to watch and cheer. She announced that the University of Maryland will open on a hybrid model with the first 2 weeks of instruction being virtual. UMD instituted a strict code of conduct on maintaining responsible social interactions to minimize the spread of COVID-19.

5. Department Reports

Administration: CM Papanikolas noted that new Interim Town Manager Allen is on board and is familiarizing herself with internal administrative processes. Otherwise, the Administration Department is running smoothly.

Town Manager's Report: ITM Allen reported that WSSC is expected to start repairs of Pontiac Street tomorrow. Public Works has covered up the sinkhole in a resident's yard on Seminole Street while Administration is researching ownership of the broken pipe that caused the sinkhole. The first issue of a new e-newsletter has been released in both English- and Spanish. SHA has responded quickly to the Town's request to clean up litter along the Kenilworth Avenue right-of-way.

Mayor Dewey asked for a motion to receive all department reports for the record. CM Sweep so moved. CM Papanikolas seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

Code Compliance: CM Brittan Powell reported that a couple of residents have complained about the high cost for renewing a rental license compared with surrounding communities. He and Code Director Goodwin are conferring about the issue and gathering additional information to respond.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that the cost of the rental license was set so that it covers the cost of the program, which includes inspections. CM Brittan Powell asked if the cost has remained the same since the Town stopped doing inspections because of the pandemic. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the cost is based on the routine service provided to owners of rental homes and might be adjusted if the Council decides to take it up.

Mayor Dewey commented the Council discussed fee structures during the last term and has started to review all fees and fines during the annual budget process. She does not believe the cost of the rental license has changed under COVID adjusted operations. ITM Allen noted that she discussed virtual inspections with Director Goodwin. No other cities in Prince George's County are doing this except Bowie. The Town continues to follow up on rental housing violations found during previous inspections with photos of repairs and installations made to come into compliance.

Parks, Recreation, Education & Civic Affairs: MPT Kulpa-Eddy announced upcoming hearings regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Beltway widening project are coming up in August and September, most of them virtual but a couple in-person. Mayor Dewey added that several environmental organizations are hosting a seminar on how to comment on the DEIS tomorrow evening, and this seminar is open to all.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy reminded residents that a couple of real property tax credit programs are available to help lower their tax bills: the Homestead Tax Credit available to all homeowners who live in their homes, and the Homeowners Tax Credits available to lower-income homeowners through both the State of Maryland and the Town of Berwyn Heights.

Public Works: CM Sweep reported that Public Works had a busy month responding to the watermain break and the Seminole Street sinkhole. He encouraged residents to help pick up trash in the neighborhood, so it does not get washed into local waterways.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy noted that one of the gates to Pop's Park still has a lock on it after the park was reopened to the public. Mayor Dewey said she believes that may be the gate giving access to Public Works vehicles for performing maintenance, which typically remains locked.

Public Safety: Mayor Dewey reported that the Police Department has published information on social media about filing noise complaints. Residents are requested not to call 911 for such complaints but instead call the County's non-emergency number or the Berwyn Heights police station number, to ensure that 911 is available for emergencies. Residents are further requested not to host large parties. Per County emergency rules, gatherings are limited to 10 people for most homes.

6. Committee Reports

Education Advisory Committee: MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that Prince George's County schools will resume instruction virtually on August 31. The BHEAC is exploring interest in 'learning pods' to support virtual instruction. Parents of students and other interested parties are requested to take a survey that has been posted online in English and Spanish. The Recreation Council and Berwyn Heights Police are hosting a school supplies drive-.

Green Team: MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that the Green Team is meeting virtually tomorrow and anyone wishing to participate should contact Green Team facilitator Jeff Knutson. Mayor Dewey noted that the Shade Tree Board is celebrating this year's trees of distinction, which are showcased on the Green Team's website <https://berwynheightsgreenteam.wordpress.com> as well as on social media. The Green Team also completed the first round of feedback and revisions for its Sustainable Maryland application and participated in the National Night In parade. The Green Team parade car carried a food scraps recycling container to advertise the new food scraps composting program. Lastly, the Green Team is looking into the requirements for becoming a Bee City, USA.

Historical Committee: Historical Committee Chair Richard Ahrens gave the report. He said the Committee met virtually on July 22 and decided to continue to meet virtually until further notice. Some activities, such as the oral history program have been halted, but the BHHC's activities can be followed on its Facebook page, YouTube channel and website. The Committee was represented in the National Night In celebration by Lee and Mark Fuerst, who decorated their car with a display of historic homes, as well as Sharmila Bhatia and Debby Steele Snyder. A new slate of officers will be elected at the September meeting. Mr. Ahrens will not run for re-election.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: There was no report.

Recreation Council: Recreation Council President Susan Jones gave the report. She said that the next virtual concert by the American Made Duo will premiere on the Recreation Council's YouTube channel on August 17. They will play a mix of Country, Swing and Rock. Another concert is scheduled for September 17, featuring local artist Mike Hummel. This round of the Recreation Council food drive is about to end, and another round will begin soon thereafter. Food donations and school supply donations can be dropped off at the Police station.

Ms. Jones said the Recreation Council tries to develop ideas for future events in the context of pandemic. A Halloween drive-in movie has been proposed, at which pre-packaged candy might be passed out. Mayor Dewey advised that the Council will discuss the status of the Town's response to the coronavirus at the next worksession, and hopes to come up with some guidance on which events are safe to hold and which events require Council or staff approval. Ms. Jones continued that the Recreation Council also plans to hold a contest for the best Halloween decorated house and a virtual Trivia Night on November 13.

Ms. Jones asked a couple of questions about the food composting program. Mayor Dewey replied that the food scraps collected by the vendor Compost Crew are taken to the Prince George's County yard

waste composting facility, with some finished compost returned to the Town. Compostable bags, such as the green produce bags found at MOM's organic market, are okay to use for composting, but no plastic can be placed in the bins.

7. Old Business

There was none.

8. New Business

Resolution 11-2020 Acceptance of Grants & Donations: Mayor Dewey explained that currently any purchase above \$10,000 must be approved by the Council. This Resolution would also require Council approval for any grant or donation the Town receives valued at \$10,000 or above. The reason for instituting this policy is that grants or donated items sometimes have maintenance or life-cycle costs, which should be considered by the Council. Secondly, donations may confer equipment to the Town that are novel or unusual in nature and should therefore be discussed by the Council.

ITM Allen said this Resolution carried over from ITM Broadbent's tenure and was discussed at the July 20 worksession. She has checked other cities' codes for similar policies or examples without much luck, except a provision in the City of Berlin's sustainable purchasing policy. She has only made one change to the Resolution, which adds a definition of novel as "new and not resembling something formerly known or used."

MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to adopt the Resolution. CM Brittan Powell seconded. MPT Kulpa-Eddy proposed to modify the definition to "new and/ or not resembling something formerly known or used." She believes this would cover a situation that came up in a previous Council. CM Sweep sought clarification as to why \$10,000 is set as the threshold. ITM Allen replied that the Town Charter requires Council approval of purchases over that amount. CM Papanikolas sought confirmation that acceptance of novel or unusual equipment is not tied to a dollar value. ITM Allen confirmed it. CM Brittan Powell said an example of novel equipment would be military surplus equipment that was conferred to the Town for free in a previous Council. The Council voted 5 to 0 to approve the Resolution.

BHES Funding Request: Mayor Dewey said the Berwyn Heights Elementary School (BHES) has submitted a \$1,450 education grant request through the Education Advisory Committee to purchase licenses for math software that would be useful for virtual instruction. The funding would come from the Town Council budget education line item. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the recipients of such Town funds should be required to submit an invoice and/ or a report on how the money was spent. ITM Allen advised that the stipulation could be made part of the motion, if there is no policy to that effect.

CM Sweep moved to approve the BHES funding request to purchase the 'Happy Numbers' math instruction software with the stipulation that the school give reports on the use and effectiveness of the program at the end of each semester. CM Brittan Powell seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

ITM Allen will confer with Treasurer Rodriguez on how education funds were paid out in the past. She plans to follow the same process.

Governor's Service Award Nomination: Mayor Dewey said resident Gerald Shields approached the Council to request that it submit an application on his behalf for the 2020 Governor's Service Award. MPT Kulpa-Eddy so moved. CM Papanikolas seconded. MPT Kulpa-Eddy said the Council is open to

consider doing the same for other residents who would like to be nominated for an award. The motion passed 5 to 0.

9. Citizen Discussion

Joan Hayden commented via telephone that it is difficult to follow Council meetings on BHTV or streamed video because the volume is too low and that a trash container at Seminole and 56th Avenue is often too full. She asked if the Town could put a lid on it so that trash is not blown around on a windy day. Mayor Dewey replied she will have ITM Allen discuss the problem with Public Works and see what can be done. She has noticed that other trash cans around Town tend to fill up more quickly, perhaps because more people are out walking now. This topic might be taken up for a full discussion at the next worksession.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk